

EXCHANGE STUDENT

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. A UTAH CANYON - NIGHT

The last rays of sunset tinge a red rock cliff overlooking a serene canyon. Quiet as death save for a lonesome wind...

All-terrain tires claw gravel. A battered Jeep cloaked with dust pulls into the canyon.

The Jeep brakes to a halt. WILL, 22, bearded, hair a touch wild, shuts the engine. He stares out the windshield, not sure if he's in the right place.

JEEP CAB

Will scoops up a survey map.

His finger traces the contours. Stops.

He snatches up his smartphone.

Geographic coordinates on the screen.

He's in the right place. Will grabs a handgun off the seat. Looks it over. Reconsiders. Tosses it back on the seat.

Will picks up a Tupperware container. It's filled with something big and red and bloody.

Will gets out holding the container.

THE CANYON

An unbelievable splash of stars above the canyon walls. Will's in the middle of nowhere.

He stares deeper into the canyon like he's looking at the end of his life.

FLASHBACK:

INT. WILL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Will propped up on his bed staring at his laptop, the only light in the room, painting him ghostly.

LAPTOP SCREEN

An online article entitled 'The Real Origins of Halloween'.

WILL

jots notes on a writing pad:

WRITING PAD

Which came first, Halloween or portal?
Utah full of dimensional holes
Check coordinates again

WILL

Grabs his smartphone. Dials. Waits out a few rings. The call goes to message.

WILL

Rachel--listen to me. Listen.
To. Me. I can't blame you for
being pissed. I just gotta
finish this. I'm really sorry
I can't give you more of myself.
I'm on the verge of something
big and I can't--

(sighs)

Shit! Why am I doing this?
You're probably hanging out with
somebody else by now anyway!

(beat)

Take care of yourself. I'm close.
I'm so close--

Will disconnects. Dialtone. He slams the smartphone down on the desk. He's clearly going out of his head.

Quickly he jots something else on the pad.

WRITING PAD

What do they eat?

Then--three quick underlines under the words.

END FLASHBACK.

CANYON

Will walks deeper into the canyon, following his flashlight's beam. The canyon walls tower higher and higher.

He stops. Squints at what's ahead.

Further up. A dark circular portal, slowly undulating. An entrance to the Otherworld. It swallows the light of the beam.

Will pops the Tupperware lid. Discards it. Sits on the ground. Studies what's in the container.

A raw beef heart.

Will sets the container down.

The portal opens. Beyond it, a strange shadowy landscape.

Will stands up. Reaches for the beef heart with his gaze fixed on the portal.

WILL

Trick or treat, fuckers.

A disturbance at the portal. A creature not of this world crawls through, bear-sized. It's covered in reptilian scales. Tentacles propel it forward. A cluster of ebony arachnid eyes glisten under the starlight.

The walking nightmare tests the gravel under it. Stops. Senses Will.

Will sucks in a breath. Slowly stands. Squeezes the beef heart like his life depends on it.

The creature breaks into a shuffling run.

Will tosses the beef heart at it.

The heart lands in front of the thing. It clambers to a halt. Studies the heart. A tentacle reaches out.

Will watches raptly. He crosses his arms.

The Otherworlder grasps the heart in its tentacle. Studies it. Scarfs it down. Stares at Will.

WILL

You're welcome. So what's the deal?

FLASHBACK:

INT. LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTION ROOM - DAY

Will sits at a table, fidgety, expectant. A sign on the wall close to him: NO PHOTOGRAPHS.

The elderly LIBRARIAN exits a small caged room where the rare books are kept. She locks the door behind her.

Will looks up as the librarian approaches. She sets the book down in front of him on the table. Will reaches for it. Stops. Stares at her. Hint.

The librarian leaves. Will pulls the book close.

THE BOOK

Centuries old. Its title: 'ANCIENT DOORWAYS'.

Will's fingers carefully turn to the table of contents. They follow the chapter list. Stop at 'The Americas'. Turn to there.

WILL

studies the book fervently. He mumbles aloud.

WILL

Conquistadors...settlements raided
by numerous unspeakable devils...
unstoppable...

Will turns the page.

WILL

Spanish towns west of the Rockies
nearly abandoned...priest Alphonso
Diego reaches out to Utes...peace
treaty thousands of years old...
What the hell?!

Will checks where the librarian is...

...at her desk doing librarian things.

He pulls out his smartphone. Snaps silent photos of the pages he's been reading. Turns to the next page.

THE BOOK

A very old map. Utah next to the Rockies. Locations pinpointed by stylish stars.

WILL

snaps this last one, the most vital. He slips the smartphone carefully back into a pocket. He's charged.

WILL

(loud voice)

Jackpot. I've hit the fucking interdimensional jackpot!

The librarian looks up with disapproval.

Will raises his hands in apology.

END FLASHBACK.

THE CANYON

The Otherworldly denizen squats in front of the portal.

Will shrugs.

WILL

Your move, Cthulhu.

The creature works its scaly jaws.

Will smiles.

WILL

Good, huh?

The creature goes on being indifferent.

WILL

Look, big guy. I didn't bring a copy of the contract you made with the Indians you used to terrorize. But I'm letting you know the Utes were human and so am I. Therefore that agreement still stands. Time means nothing to you folks anyway, right?

The creature stops working its jaws. It shambles forward.

Will backs up a step.

WILL

You understood me? I hope so, my friend. Look--here's all I want. An exchange. Like students. One world for another. I want to explore yours.

The creature tilts its head.

WILL

Just a few hours taking pictures. Right before dawn, we change places. Fair enough?

The Otherworlder stops in front of Will. Extends a tentacle.

The tentacle tip explores Will's face and neck. Will is repulsed but holds his ground. The tentacle withdraws.

WILL

That's not an answer.

The creature steps aside.

WILL

I take that as a yes.

Will heads for the portal, his excitement mounting.

He reaches the opening, uncertain about how to enter. He looks back.

The creature is gone.

Will pulls out his smartphone. Holds it in front of him.

He takes a step forward.

SMARTPHONE SCREEN

Three more similar creatures clamber out of the portal, filling up the screen.

WILL

recoils in shock.

WILL

Whoa whoa whoa!

The Otherworlders attack Will, knocking him to the ground.

His smartphone goes flying.

They drag him kicking and hollering through the portal.

The smartphone lands on the gravel, screen up.

An incoming text lights up the screen:

will rachel. sorry couldn't get
back sooner. didn't you know i
had midterms? where are you?
yes i was pissed but i want to
see you. all your profs told me
you've been skipping class for
weeks. btw i still love u.
call!

The portal, deserted.

EXT. CANYON - DAY - WILL'S POV

Ground level. Dawn light seeps into the canyon. The portal, out of focus at first. It gradually dissolves.

WILL'S FACE

Will grimaces as he tries to get up. He groans in pain.
He's confused. He looks down.

Below the neck he possesses the tentacled nightmare body of
an Otherworlder. Will screams his guts out.

His screams subside when he sees something next to him.

The Tupperware container. Something red and bloody inside.
A tentacle reaches out. Grasps the container.

Will pulls the container close with the tentacle. Pries
open the lid. He stares in disbelief at what's inside.

A heart. Smaller than the first. Human-sized.

Will contemplates the meaning. His face goes grim.
He looks up, into the canyon. Back down at the heart.

Will slowly devours it.

FADE OUT.